

AUG / SEPT 2008



# CDCR news

COMMUNICATING WITH PROFESSIONALS IN CORRECTIONS AND PAROLE

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Cover Photo by George Nyberg





## CDCR Staff, Inmate Firefighters Assist in State's Toughest Fire Season on Record

**By George Kostyrko, Chief, Office of Communications**

California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) staff, wards and inmate firefighters were joined by the National Guard in fighting hundreds of fires across California during July and early August, in a fire season noted by experts as the largest since the state began keeping records.

Meteorologists and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL Fire) representatives anticipate this fire season will run through November, and stretch firefighting resources – such as those that CDCR contributes – to their limits this year. According to the state Office of Emergency Services, the wildfires that began June 21 are “the largest single fire event in the history of California.”

At times, more than 2,500 inmate firefighters making up some 160 inmate crews, and nearly 250 custody and firefighting staff were dispatched into some of the largest infernos in areas as diverse as Butte, Tehama,

Monterey and Kern counties.

“I am pleased that CDCR resources, through our trained staff and inmate firefighting crews, can be put to such an important public service need,” said CDCR Secretary Matthew Cate. “Inmate and ward firefighting crews and the custody staff who supervise them are a critical component of the state’s coordinated effort to battle wildfires and respond to other emergencies.”

Captain Ray Harrington, the CDCR liaison with CAL Fire, noted that this fire season has been particularly resource intensive. Already, all three CDCR Strike Teams have been sent out simultaneously to the same fire in Tehama and Butte counties, which has rarely happened in the history of CDCR.

Beginning in late June, lightning strikes statewide sparked some 1,781 separate blazes. Because of the large number of ongoing fires, state firefighting resources had to be triaged into areas with populations



and buildings at risk. As of mid-July nearly 300 blazes continued to smolder throughout the state – many in remote locations. So far this fire season, more than 1,300 square miles of the state have been torched by fires, with more than 100 homes destroyed.

According to the Office of Emergency Services, the previous record was set in 2003, when wildfires blackened 1,155 square miles. State record keeping for fires began in 1936. California’s estimated population in 2007 was 36.5 million residents. In 1936, the state’s population was just under 6 million.

“This speaks to how large and intense this fire season is,” Harrington said. “If it is threatening structures then we are needed to assist setting backfires and fire breaks to assist the effort so that our men in the field have a chance with this fire.”

Photo (including inset) Courtesy of Office of Emergency Services



"We are fully staffed with inmate fire crews that are staged at the Chowchilla and Madera staging areas. We are fully prepared to tackle the fire when needed. We are fully ready for deployment. CAL Fire has been very appreciative of our assistance in these wildfire prevention and suppression efforts. It is a partnership that has been going on for more than 50 years."

There are 42 adult and two Division of Juvenile Justice Conservation Camps in California. CDCR jointly manages 37 adult and juvenile camps with CAL Fire and five adult camps with the Los Angeles County Fire Department. More than 4,400 offenders participate in the Conservation Camp Program, which has approximately 200 fire crews.

In an average year, the CDCR Conservation Camp Program provides three million person hours in firefighting and other emergencies, and seven million person hours in community service project work, saving California taxpayers more than \$80 million annually on average.

"Typically neighbors aren't happy when they see a group of felons surround their house," said Richard Subia, CDCR Associate Director for Operations, who oversees the camp program. "But when our inmate firefighters show up, there is a sigh of relief because everyone knows they are trained to help."

Not only has CDCR played an important role in the state's fire suppression efforts but it also works to provide cooperative state agencies with an able-bodied, trained workforce for other emergencies such as floods and earthquakes.



Photo by George Nyberg

Camp training prepares inmates for rigorous duty on fire lines.

"The juvenile wards taking part in these programs find that it is a meaningful way to give back to society while learning a worthwhile skill. We have had several individuals go on to be firefighters after incarceration thanks to these programs," said Bernard Warner, Chief Deputy Secretary for the CDCR's Division of Juvenile Justice.

Since 1946, the Conservation Camp Program has provided California with a well-trained, well-equipped workforce for fire suppression. The crews respond to nearly every type of emergency, including wildfires, floods, search and rescue operations, and earthquakes. They also log millions of hours annually on fire reduction and conservation projects and provide forest, range and watershed enhancement on public lands.

Only minimum-custody inmates may participate in the Conservation Camp Program. They must be physically

fit and have no history of a violent crime, including kidnapping, sex offenses, arson or escape. Juvenile offenders earn their way into camp placement and must be free of major rule infractions. Wards convicted of sex offenses or arson are excluded. ■

The CDCR website will be updated with inmate and ward fire camp statistics, photos, video segments, links to related websites and other relevant information regarding the camp program.

Visit: [http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Conservation\\_Camps/index.html](http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Conservation_Camps/index.html) today!

"In September, four California Correctional Institution staff who were assaulted by inmates in an unprovoked April 3 attack will be honored as winners of the American Correctional Officer Organization Gold Medal of Honor. A story of the attack and their meeting with Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger was in the June issue of CDCR News. Look for expanded coverage of the four being honored in the next issue of CDCR News.



Photo by George Nyberg

Inmate crews create a Backline Fire Break.

In Northern California, Antonio Amador (second from left, front row) swore in the OCS Agents. Secretary Matt Cate sits to Amador's left. Richard Rimmer sits to his right.



Photo by Eric Owens

## CDCR Agents Deputized as U.S. Marshals

*By George Kostyrko, Chief, Office of Communications*

This July, the final 25 of 67 CDCR Office of Correctional Safety Fugitive Apprehension Team agents were sworn in as United States Marshals by Antonio C. Amador, United States Marshal for the Eastern District of California.

"We couldn't be more proud of the relationship we have with the U.S. Marshals office," said CDCR Secretary Matthew Cate. "This is more than symbolic. This ceremony formalizes that relationship."

In 2007, CDCR Fugitive Apprehension Team (FAT) agents arrested 2,600 offenders, of which approximately 76 percent were either parolees-at-large, or parolees wanted for some major violations of their parole terms such attempted murder, rape, arson, gang activity and drug sales.

The Office of Correctional Safety (OCS) represents all major adult and juvenile law enforcement, investigative, security, and intelligence functions

(excluding internal affairs). Earlier in June, agents that comprise the OCS FAT teams for Southern California were also sworn in. This is the second time the OCS agents have been sworn in. The first time was in 2006.

"We benefit from the work you do out on the streets," said US Marshal Amador, addressing the CDCR fugitive agents. "I think you all know how important it is to have this local relationship when working with federal agents. We depend on you and your expertise to get the job done and get these bad guys off these streets."

Thomas Hession, Chief Inspector, Regional Fugitive Task Force for the U.S. Marshals Service, told the agents; "We are all going after the same guys. It has truly been an excellent relationship. I thank you for your continued hard work."

OCS Assistant Secretary Richard Rimmer said the fugitive teams started

in 1996 and over time, his agents and the U.S. Marshals found themselves crossing paths on some high profile cases that led to an informal working relationship about five years ago.

"This formal relationship with the U.S. Marshals is the next step in the evolution of these teams and is definitely where this department wants to go," Rimmer said. "With the U.S. Marshals we are able to take the absolute worst-of-the-worst off the streets."

Fugitive Apprehension Team Administrator Michael Castro said the CDCR relationship benefits the U.S. Marshals Service because OCS agents know the culture of the parolees, and can get easy access to inmate and parolee field files and other necessary intelligence, which speeds up the surveillance and additional intelligence-gathering activities when an investigation begins.



## Office of Correctional Safety Fugitive Apprehension Team Members Named U.S. Marshals

**Richard A. Rimmer, Assistant Secretary**

**Anthony Chaus, Chief**

**Michael Castro, Administrator**

Anaya, Eli, Parole Agent II

Ashley, Jon, Parole Agent I

Avakemian, Hrand, Parole Agent II

Barr, Glenn, Parole Agent I

Barron, Jesus, Parole Agent I

Basile, Joe, Parole Agent I

Bell, Anthony, Parole Agent II

Bellmeyer, James, Parole Agent I

Bergerson, Philip, Parole Agent I

Caballero, Jaime, Parole Agent II

Carbajal, Victor, Parole Agent I

Castro, Nate, Parole Agent I

Chu, Roy, Parole Agent III

Colbert, Shad, Parole Agent I

Cornwell, Stephen, Parole Agent I

Duskey, Sharon, Parole Agent I

Earl, Baron, Parole Agent I

Fernandez, David, Parole Agent II

Fletcher, Marylan, Parole Agent I

Franco, Patricia, Parole Agent III

Gigliotti, Ryan, Parole Agent III

Griffin, Jeff, Parole Agent I

Guzman, Lucio, Parole Agent I

Hamaguchi, Derek, Parole Agent I

Hemmerson, Parole Agent II

Holmes, Lydia, Parole Agent III

Jue, Jerold, Parole Agent I

Karkazis, Lefty, Parole Agent II

Kraus, Eric, Parole Agent I

Lara, Jason, Parole Agent I

Lozano, Sean, Parole Agent I

McIntosh, Floyd, Parole Agent I

McLaughlin, Jeff, Parole Agent II

Montgomery, Wayne, Parole Agent I

Moore, Scott, Parole Agent I

Morales, Raul, Parole Agent I

Morris, Chris, Parole Agent I

Ohno, Timothy, Parole Agent II

Peterson, David, Parole Agent I

Phillip Balmet, Parole Agent I

Pierini, Leo, Parole Agent I

Pitcher, Michael, Parole Agent II

Pittman, David, Parole Agent I

Reitz, Dennis, Parole Agent II

Renaud, Greg, Parole Agent I

Resko, Joseph, Parole Agent I

Rochelle, Larry, Parole Agent II

Santoro, Louis, Parole Agent I

Segura, Jose, Parole Agent I

Smalling, Chris, Parole Agent I

Smith, Curtis, Parole Agent II

Tang, Michael, Parole Agent I

Taylor, Earl, Parole Agent II

Wheeler, Robert, Parole Agent I

Widener, John, Parole Agent III

Williams, Ted, Parole Agent I

Zuniga-Ruelas, Lisa, Parole Agent I

"The U.S. Marshals bring technological equipment we can't afford or don't have, as well as a wealth of manpower resources that can assist us out in the field," Castro said. "It is a mutually beneficial relationship. We also get to cross-train with them, which enhances the safety of our agents and the safety of the public while we are out doing an operation."

Castro points to the record of the FAT with pride. Since forming in 1996, OCS agents have twice been recipients of the department's Medal of Valor award. In the most recent Medal of Valor ceremony, 11 OCS agents were recognized for a variety of on-the-job activities that either centered around ongoing investigations or an agent coming across a civilian in need of help.

"It comes down to training and these partnerships," Castro said. "These guys we are going after have committed major crimes, have a history of violence and they are hiding for a reason. They don't want to be caught, and they are armed or believed to be armed when we come in on them. Our guys train to the level of a high-risk warrant-service team – probably one of the highest risk activities." ■



Southern California Agents are sworn in.

# Lancaster Officer Named Antelope Valley Peace Officer of the Year

By George Kostyrko, Chief, Office of Communications

Years ago, when Michael Webb toiled away on the family farm in the South as a teenager, he daydreamed of being a police officer doing detective work. At that time, those dreams seemed as far-fetched as the idea that he might live in California some day.

More than 40 years later, California State Prison, Los Angeles County (LAC) Correctional Officer Michael Webb was recently honored by his peers, the city of Palmdale, and the county of Los Angeles as Antelope Valley Correctional Officer of the Year.

In the past year, Webb, working with local law enforcement, has aided in the arrest of several parolees and civilians who have conspired with inmates to introduce contraband and narcotics into the prison.

The 24-year CDCR veteran was given this award for his contributions to the safety and security of the community-at-large.

CSP, LAC Warden Brian Haws said that local law enforcement depends on the intelligence gathered by officers like Michael Webb to be more effective in their community-oriented policing.

Webb said he was grateful and surprised to be honored. However, he said his greatest reward is waking up every day, coming to work and making a difference for public safety.

"The cat and mouse of all this, this is what drives me when I come to work," Webb said. "The digging, the investigation -- that is what I really enjoy. Taking a little piece of evidence, and allowing it to develop into a full picture of what might be transpiring in the facility, or on that yard. You then get an idea of the kind of activities that

might be occurring on a larger scale and whether or not it involves visitors."

Webb is currently assigned to the CSP, LAC's Investigative Services Unit. As a security squad officer, he is responsible for the surveillance and intelligence gathering of any illegal inmate activity

which may lead to a breach of security.

Webb said while the clues to potential crime might be different with each day, at the end of the investigation, the investigator usually determines that the savvy, gang-entrenched inmates use the same time-tested methods to get their

contraband into an institution.

The method of smuggling is nearly always the same. Drug dealing "shotcaller" inmates conspire to use visitors and Level One inmates that are off grounds doing public service work, to work in concert to bring a steady supply of tobacco, marijuana, heroin and methamphetamine. Contraband is dropped off outside the gates at pre-arranged locations by friends, family or visitors wrapped in small bindles. It is then smuggled in by inmates.

"From our perspective, the majority of the problems we have in an institution come from gangs," Webb said. "The only way they can finance their activities is through drug sales and intimidation. Because of that, like-types of inmates are forced to hang out together for protection, which fuels the drug trade."

Webb said his efforts toward drug interdiction, gang surveillance and intelligence gathering leads directly beyond the gates of the institutions and into the nearby communities, where friends and family of inmates often migrate, as well as parolees who are lured by the easy money that smuggling contraband brings them.

Heroin worth \$200 outside the gates of prison is maybe worth four times that when inmates sell it on the prison yards.

"The police side is what drives me," Webb said. "When I see a guy who is not rehabilitating and just wants to break the rules, and has no drive to change or do something positive that drives me to want to bust those guys. We don't want them on the streets and we definitely don't want them here in Antelope Valley."

Webb said that he takes his experiences behind prison walls and does a lot of community speaking with youth about avoiding gang activity, staying in school, believing in one's self and being self-motivated. ■



Officer Webb compares fingerprints found on a weapon with the prints of a probable suspect.



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# Dave Runnels Looks Back on 26+ Years at Corrections

*By George Kostyrko, Chief, Office of Communications*

Communication and respect - two of the most powerful tools Undersecretary Dave Runnels has used in his 26 years at the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR).

Runnels credits these two very simple, yet critical tools in assisting him daily to protecting staff, inmates and wards he has been charged to oversee during his productive time at CDCR.

On August 30, Runnels will work his final day with department, and begin his new assignment as Chief Security Consultant for the Office of the Receiver following the Labor Day weekend. Runnels will be creating a new agency for state government in the Receiver's plan to build seven new long-term care facilities for 10,500 inmates.

"Dave is a smart and decisive manager with a wealth of experience in the California correctional system," said Secretary Matt Cate. "He will be missed tremendously by CDCR but I'm certain he will continue to assist us greatly in building a productive relationship with the Receiver's office now and into the future."

Reflecting on his time at CDCR, Runnels believes in providing employees with clear expectations while allowing them to grow in the job they were hired to do.

Runnels began his career with corrections in 1982 after his job as a meat cutter in the San Joaquin Valley was derailed by the strike. He applied for a job at Deuel Vocational Institution, where he began his career.

Following his years at DVI, Runnels promoted through the ranks: from Correctional Officer to Sergeant and Lieutenant at California State Prison, Solano, to Employee Relations Officer, Correctional Captain, Correctional Business Manager I and II, Associate Warden and, in 2001, Warden at High Desert State Prison in Susanville.

Since 2001, he has demonstrated equal success at CDCR's Sacramento headquarters. After serving as Deputy Director and Chief Deputy Secretary for Adult Operations and as acting Undersecretary, Runnels

was appointed Undersecretary of Operations by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger on May 28, 2008.

He credits the influence of former bosses and mentors for giving Runnels the confidence to shoot higher.

"I attribute my growth and those experiences that really gave me faith in my abilities to lead, to individuals like Peggy Kernan, my warden at CSP, Solano; Bill Rains, my captain at CSP, Solano; Deneice Mayle, who served as warden at CSP, Solano and High Desert; Roy Castro, my warden at HDSP; and Carl Larson, who identified my abilities to manage a high security prison," Runnels said.

During his CDCR career, Runnels has had numerous accomplishments. Three of his proudest accomplishments, he said, include:

- creating an emergency response plan that served as a pilot while he was Warden at High Desert State Prison and later was implemented statewide to all prisons;
- leading the "right prison-right mission" workgroup that examined placing inmates in facilities based on their classification appropriate to the physical plant's security strengths and weaknesses; and
- overseeing the Division of Juvenile Justice's downsizing transition while ensuring nearly every staff had a job opportunity waiting for them once the facilities closed.

As Undersecretary, which gave him the broadest view of CDCR, Runnels said his greatest satisfaction came from seeing the extremely high-level of professionalism from the tens of thousands of operations staff that he oversees.

"When you truly look at the work of all the staff, it is impressive when you think that we oversee the welfare of several hundred thousand inmates and parolees, and we have very few serious problems considering the risks this population poses," Runnels said.

"The unfortunate thing is that it can feel like there is no room for error. It creates a lot of stress for CDCR employees, because when

something negative happens, there's a tremendous reaction and it tends to get magnified beyond reason. It's important to manage in a steady fashion and not allow a few incidents to dominate significant policy decisions."

According to Scott Kernan, Chief Deputy Secretary for Adult Operations, Runnels' leadership has been marked by common sense and sensitivity to how line-level staff would be effected by decisions he has made.

"His prison experience and definitive management style has served the department at a time of great need," Kernan said. "In his new position with the Receiver he will ensure that this new construction is completed in a custodially-sound manner while meeting the special needs of this population."

Jerry Powers, Chief Probation Officer for Stanislaus County, said that Runnels' leadership will be missed, especially on public safety issues of interest to the counties.

"He is a clear communicator who understands all aspects of the CDCR operations and has an uncanny ability to cut to the heart of the issue and efficiently and effectively address issues," Powers said. "He is one of those rare individuals that has connected with Chief Probation Officers up and down the state and attained a level of comfort and trust with our organization that had been previously lacking."

Recently, Runnels has assumed responsibilities for supervising all administration offices, in addition to the operations offices.

"It is amazing the amount of support this department and our field personnel require. Collectively, all of our staff, even in those areas with serious staff shortages, always rises to each and every challenge. It truly is a 'get it done' organization." ■





## Coordinated Construction Plan will Reduce Inmate Overcrowding and Protect Public Safety

*By Matthew Cate, Secretary, CDCR*

Veteran employees within the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) know all too well that California's prison system faces a multitude of challenges that have spanned several decades.

Many of these same challenges were faced by previous administrations, and have continued to grow more complex and unwieldy as the inmate population increases.

Developing and implementing a comprehensive prison reform plan is much easier to talk about than to actually carry out.

As CDCR Secretary, I plan to continue the momentum established by my predecessor to do that heavy lifting and make a difference in how this agency will balance the interests of public safety with those of reform and rehabilitation. I'm committed to working with local government and law enforcement to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for parolees returning home.

Today, there are many parties with not only a stake, but an actual voice in how the CDCR moves forward to address the state's current prison overcrowding crisis. Those partners include federal judges, the Legislature, as well as our partners in local communities.

In June, this department presented the Legislature with a coordinated strategy to reduce overcrowding in our state prisons. This strategy allows California to plan wisely and efficiently for our current and future needs and considers input from all of our stakeholders to ensure that our



transformation of this department to meet these challenges.

The report notes that in order to effectively reduce overcrowding, CDCR must implement an integrated strategy that includes:

- Expanded capacity through implementation of AB 900;
- Construction of the Receiver's health care facilities;
- Significant budget and policy reforms;

This strategic plan takes into account the state's plans for constructing prison beds, as authorized last year by AB 900, the federal receiver's plans for constructing health care facilities, the implementation of policy reforms, the current budget situation and inmate population projections years into the future.

While that may sound like a tall order, I am confident that we have enough support from local government, members of the Legislature, as well as Governor Schwarzenegger to focus these competing priorities into a triaged series of action steps:

- Immediately begin construction

and reform efforts will provide long lasting results that ultimately work to protect public safety.

I encourage every CDCR employee to review this plan, and visualize their role in the eventual

of AB 900 infill beds: 4,800 beds in Phase 1/Priority 1 (up to 8,600 total in Phases 1 and 2);

- Support the Receiver's construction of medical facilities: 10,000 beds;
- Continue acquisition and construction of AB 900 secure community reentry facilities: 3,000 in Phase 1 (up to 11,000 total in Phases 1 and 2); and,
- Implement policy reforms: summary parole or other effective reform measures.

The development of this plan is a critical first step in a multi-faceted effort to begin the process of reform, however, CDCR will not achieve results by working alone.

Our state leaders must work together to build a strong coalition of legislators, law enforcement and community members uniting behind a coordinated plan to reduce overcrowding.

My commitment is to keep you informed of our forward movement, and in time, to visit with you at your workplace in an effort to share in the successes and applaud your efforts in assisting this department in making serious reforms and change – one institution at a time.

For more information, please visit either of these locations. For the Internet, please visit [http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/News/2008\\_Press\\_Releases/June\\_18.html](http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/News/2008_Press_Releases/June_18.html)

For the intranet, please visit [http://intranet/main/Overcrowding\\_Strategy.asp](http://intranet/main/Overcrowding_Strategy.asp) ■



# DJJ Celebrates Juveniles Achieving Success While on Parole

*By Jonathan Parsley, Information Officer II*

Last month, The Division of Juvenile Justice Parole Operations celebrated parolees who have been successful in their transition back into the San Joaquin County community with a youth recognition banquet held in their honor.

CDCR and the DJJ Parole Operations partnered with youth organizations in an effort to assist juvenile parolees in gaining work experience while recognizing other parolees for a job well done while on parole.

One group of youths was honored for transitioning back into their community and becoming law-abiding citizens while working toward achieving an honorable discharge from parole. The second group of parolees received certificates after attending day-long workshops where they were taught job-seeking skills to enhance reentry into San Joaquin County while on parole.

The workshops, sponsored by businesses, county and state officials, included employment advice about filling out applications, resume writing, dressing for success, interviewing techniques and mock interviews. The parolees were also offered courses in life skills such as cosmetic makeovers, financial planning and tattoo removal.

Valerie Frazier, Parole Agent III, worked with a team to organize this event which has one common goal: bridge the transition from incarceration to parole to life on the outside.

"With more than 100 people in attendance, supportive family members and 49 parolees being recognized for their achievements, this partnership organization works to reduce recidivism," Frazier said. "The volunteers help to guide youth to a better life."

The youth told DJJ staff they were amazed at the number of people concerned for their future success on parole and beyond. Several of the paroled youth have committed to becoming public speakers focusing on at-risk youth as part of the completion of their community service hours. One proud family member shouted out during the



Valerie Frazier, PA III, gets the crowd on its feet.

ceremony, "I knew you could do it!"

San Joaquin County Superior Court Presiding Judge William J. Murray, Jr., remarked in his presentation, "If you take nothing else from today's efforts and the interaction with the community stakeholders, don't forget that we are here today because we care about you. Now, I don't want to see any of you in my courtroom, unless you are serving on jury duty or representing the law." The room filled with applause and laughter.

Guest presenters during the daylong event included: DJJ Chief Deputy Secretary Bernard Warner; Stockton Mayor Ed Chavez; CDCR Assistant Secretary for Policy, Analysis and Planning Michael Carrington; CDCR Director of Juvenile Parole Operations Rachel Rios; CDCR Deputy Regional Parole Administrator Zakiya Khalfani; and a field representative for Senator Michael Machado.

"This event demonstrates the importance of the CDCR/DJJ Parole Operation collaboration with critical stakeholders such as the Mayor of Stockton, the Stockton Chamber of Commerce, Juvenile Court judges, educators, law enforcement, the business community and the youth's families, all working toward the mutual goal of helping youth change their lives in a positive direction which will help them to ultimately succeed in the community," said Rios.

"What a great opportunity for the youth to gain valuable skills and to be recognized for their accomplishments. This underscores the value of community partnerships and the role that parole plays in successfully transitioning youth back into their communities. The courts are often faced with the difficult decision of what to do with a youth who has exhausted community and local alternatives," said Rios.

During the celebration banquet, there were more than 30 San Joaquin County officials and several CDCR DJJ staff present to support the positive progress made by the youth. One memorable moment was when 16-year-old Alejandro was recognized by Sacramento Parole staff. Since he was released from O.H. Close Youth Correctional Facility, he enrolled in high school and maintained a 3.83 grade point average. Alejandro is on the football team and has high marks for citizenship in school. Alejandro has completed all of his parole requirements, including substance abuse counseling and community service. As he received his award, his father's eyes filled with tears of pride. He is just one of many success stories that emerged from this program.

There were local businesses on-hand accepting job applications and holding interviews. Ten youth were hired on the spot. ■

# De Witt Nelson; El Paso de Robles Youth Correctional Facilities Shutter Doors in Final Closing Ceremonies in June

By Josie Slonski, PA III, El Paso de Robles YCF & Alicia Ginn, PA III, De Witt Nelson YCF

During the last two weeks of June, two Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) facilities slated for closure by July 31 conducted closing ceremonies marked by community interaction and a reflection on the historical role of the facilities in their communities.

The first ceremony, conducted June 20 in Paso Robles, marked the closing of the El Paso de Robles Youth Correctional Facility (Paso) 61 years after it opened on the grounds of a converted U.S. Army base. More than 400 staff, former staff and community members attended the ceremony. The facility, which will undergo reuse as an older inmate male facility sometime in the next 12 months, will be renamed Estrella Correctional Facility.

A week later, the De Witt Nelson Youth Correctional Facility near Stockton conducted a closing ceremony on June 27 for more than 300 current and former employees, including members of the community. The facility had been in operation for 36 years.

In both situations, a mix of retired employees, current employees and members of the community, many of them, longtime volunteers participated in the ceremony. They watched the colors and the flags at both institutions taken down, one final time.

These facilities were closed as the result of Historical declines in the DJJ population which were hastened by recent legislation which became effective in September 2007. DJJ population of 1,936 wards is expected to reduce to around 1,500 wards.

As a result of SB 81, offenders that would have otherwise been referred

to the DJJ for less serious crimes now remain with their county of commitment.

It is widely believed youthful offenders can be better served at the local level where services and family are close at hand. This is part of the fundamental shift of keeping lower level offenders at home near local treatment services and it also facilitates support from their families and the community-at-large.

## Paso Robles Closure

Under a cloudless blue sky with the temperature climbing to more than 105 degrees, current and former employees, friends, families, and local community leaders came together and officially said a final farewell to the Paso facility in a bittersweet ceremony.

The Paso facility originally opened its doors in 1947. It was the very first facility that the department was able to plan, design, and build from the ground up to meet the treatment needs of juvenile offenders. The institution historically has been referred to many as the "Boys School" and many who addressed the crowd with their

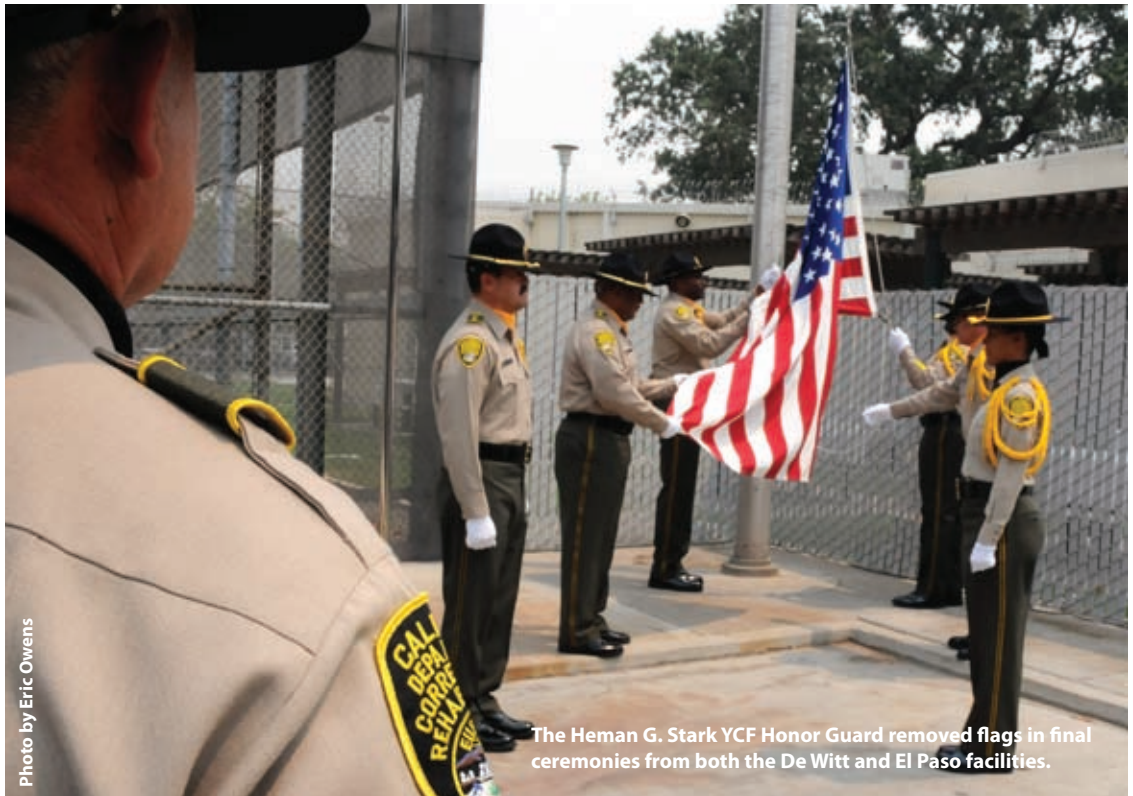
memories called it "the Boys School."

"Your efforts, your heart, and your sense of hope has transformed this close-knit community to embrace this facility as its own," said DJJ Chief Deputy Secretary Bernard Warner. "Your dedication to the wards, this facility and the community at large will never be forgotten as the facility enters a new chapter in the correctional environment. Thank you for your service."

The Skip Ottoson Visiting and Training Center displayed memorabilia. Tables of newspaper articles, photo albums, sports trophies, and plaques commemorated many years of positive achievements by the wards and staff.

The room was filled with evidence of six decades of public service: support to local victim organizations, local Headstart Christmas parties for Paso Robles needy children and families, and millions of hours of fire fighting and community service projects provided by the Los Robles Fire Camp.

"You kind of forget, after a while, how much we've really accomplished,"



The Heman G. Stark YCF Honor Guard removed flags in final ceremonies from both the De Witt and El Paso facilities.



said Lynn Davies, a retired El Paso YCF teacher. "It's just quite amazing, all the programs we've done, and all the success stories we've had."

Former employees and friends came from across the United States to reunite and participate in the final closing ceremony. Many had not seen some of their peers for many years.

Former Lieutenant Patti Schoeber, retired for more than 10 years, returned to the Paso facility to see her "family." Stories were shared, war stories were exaggerated, hugs and handshakes were exchanged, and life updates were given. Heartfelt, yet sad laughter was heard and some tears were shed as memories and old faces were recalled.

The Paso facility has the unique circumstance and geographic isolation that led to many staff having worked together for the majority of their careers. As a result, strong bonds of camaraderie were woven over time.

Consequently, the lives of staff members have intertwined at many levels: staff are friends outside of work; staff are neighbors to other staff, and staff's children have gone to school, played sports, attended places of worship and scouts together. The closing of the Paso facility signified not only a change in work placement for remaining staff, but also a change in relationships and friendships that have been built up over the years.

"It's been a good run," said Parole Agent Brian Mummert, a 21-year employee.

Downtown Main Street Association (City of Paso Robles) Director Norma Moye waved a wadded tissue in hand, "Please note: we love you. Bye."

El Paso de Robles YCF Superintendent Dave Bacigalupo closed the ceremony with these words, "The success the 'Boys School' has had in mentoring, molding, and changing lives of many young men is a tremendous tribute to your dedication and professionalism."

The Heman G. Stark Youth Correctional Facility Color Guard and Honor Guard then retired the institution's flag at the exact moment when the day's only breeze blew under the shade of a large oak tree.

## Dewitt Nelson Closure

With the day a bit cooler, the closing ceremonies at the De Witt Nelson Youth Correctional Facility were conducted in the visitor center, which was packed with more than 300 staff, former staff and community members.

The De Witt facility opened in December 1971, with the focus primarily on vocational pursuits with an emphasis on pre-forestry training, followed by academic and vocational education and work experience. In later years, the facility moved away from a vocation mission and focused on specific treatment needs such as substance abuse treatment and anger management.

The ceremony was marked by reminiscences from one of the first administrators to work in the then-new facility in 1971, comments from current Chief Deputy Director Bernard Warner, and the present facility Superintendent Michael Minor.

"While this experience is bittersweet, the closure of this facility has been known for some time and the employees here have been remarkably professional in the months leading up to today," Warner said. "It is extremely difficult to close this facility, but the reality we face with the DJJ is that we have a declining population and we have made a commitment to the courts on treatment for juveniles that remain with us."

De Witt was the third facility at the Stockton complex to open, following the opening of the O.H. Close Youth Correctional Facility and the Karl Holton Youth Correctional Facility (closed in 2003) in the late 1960s. Both the O.H. Close facility and the N.A. Chaderjian Youth Correctional Facility remain open.

Veteran Education Administrator Jim Flynn, who started work at the facility the first day it opened as the superintendent of the school, also spoke. He said visiting the facility unleashed a flood of memories long forgotten as he strolled the grounds one final time. He shared one humorous story after another that spoke to a more innocent time when treatment

was a greater priority than security.

Flynn's recollections that teachers used to take wards out in their own vehicles for driver's education training on the roads at the complex elicited a number of chuckles from retired staff and a few gasps from new staff.

"It is quite moving to be back in time to see this close," Flynn said.

De Witt Superintendent Michael Minor thanked the remaining employees for their courage and honesty during the last six months following the January announcement that De Witt would close.

"Despite all the stress and uncertainty, De Witt Nelson employees have always strived to do their best to provide public safety and public service to this state and the surrounding community," Minor said.

Following these remarks, the Preston Youth Correctional Facility Color Guard retired the two flags gracing the stage. The Heman G. Stark Youth Correctional Facility Color Guard took down the institution flag for the final flag folding and retirement ceremony. After the final institution count was announced, the peal of a horn shrieked a lonesome chord and the closing ceremony ended.

(No plans for the reuse of the Dewitt Nelson Youth Correctional Facility have been announced). ■





## **Submissions**

*CDCR News* publicizes staff activities, innovative programs, and transmits important information to the rank-and-file. To that end, we are always looking for interesting stories and pictures to be submitted for publication. Please send your submissions to:

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